



**COMMON CAUSE**

*Holding Power Accountable*



Common Cause and the  
Common Cause Education Fund

**Annual Report 2005-2006**

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Since 1970, Common Cause has been an organization committed to democracy: engaging citizens in their government, and ensuring that government lives up to the expectations of its citizens by being open, honest, and accountable.

Common Cause is a non-profit 501 (c)(4) organization. The Common Cause Education Fund (CCEF) – a 501 (c)(3) tax-exempt public charity– is the public education and research affiliate of Common

Cause. Since its creation in 2000, CCEF has significantly increased the organization's capacity to shape public opinion on longstanding issue priorities, and it has enabled the organization to develop new programs in areas such as election and media reform.

Over the previous year, Common Cause advanced the cause of democracy in five specific issue areas:

elections, money and politics, media reform, congressional, state and local ethics, and civil rights.

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**Cover image:** Common Cause/New York activists  
push for Clean Elections at an Albany rally.

# Dear Friend of Common Cause:



## Common Cause's DNA is all about encouraging democracy.

That has been our goal since our founding in 1970. John Gardner, a Republican who had served in Democratic President Lyndon Johnson's cabinet, founded Common Cause to be a "citizens' lobby" – working for the public interest. Our first victories – helping to end the Vietnam War, a constitutional amendment giving 18-year-olds the right to vote, freedom of information, and open meetings laws – put us on the map and inspired thousands of Americans to join us.

For more than 35 years, we have been advancing Gardner's vision of a fully functioning, open, and accountable democracy with the maximum participation of all citizens. Common Cause has 300,000 members and supporters. Our 35 state offices have been responsible for the passage of hundreds of cutting-edge state and municipal-level political reform laws.

But no organization can allow itself to sit on its laurels. During the past 12 months, Common Cause faced new challenges and opportunities, as pressing problems plaguing our democracy drove our efforts to find viable solutions.

Concerns over the fairness of the 2004 elections and the security of our voting systems reinvigorated our efforts to ensure that every vote is counted and that every vote counts. We were instrumental in making sure that those angered by the 2004 election difficulties did not long stay mired in disillusionment, but rather became activists working to remove barriers to voting that have kept eligible voters from being able to exercise their rights and fighting for a verifiable paper trail to ensure the integrity of our ballots.

Likewise, a major scandal in Connecticut that resulted in the resignation and then imprisonment of the state's governor transformed citizen outrage into vibrant activism, resulting in the passage of one of the nation's most comprehensive public financing laws. The new law will level the playing field so that more qualified candidates can successfully run for office, and will ensure that what matters most in Connecticut elections is what voters want, not the narrow demands of campaign contributors.

When the Jack Abramoff scandal exploded in early 2006, Common Cause marshaled citizen discontent into a powerful force advocating for congressional ethics reform and public financing for Congress.

The victory in Connecticut and our current work on public financing or "Clean Elections for Congress" demonstrate one of our core convictions at Common Cause: citizens working together are the most powerful force in our democracy. Hundreds of thousands of Common Cause activists used their distaste for "business as usual" in Washington and in our state capitols to fuel activism for positive change, making their voices heard on issues ranging from establishing fair political districts to preserving the Internet as a vehicle for democratic discourse. Their energy and hope reminds us once again of the truth of Gardner's words, written in 1972:

*"Government of, by and for the people is the most exhilarating venture man has ever undertaken."*

Chellie Pingree, President and CEO

# Elections

During the 2004 presidential and congressional elections, tens of thousands of Americans faced long lines and malfunctioning voting machines.

Thousands more were told they were not registered to vote. Minority voters in particular encountered serious obstacles to voting, sometimes outright harassment and deliberate misinformation.

Common Cause worked to document the problems that voters encountered in 2004. Working in coalition with other groups, Common Cause established a voter alert phone line that drew calls from more than 200,000 voters seeking information about their polling places and registering complaints. In December 2004, Common Cause, The Century Foundation, and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights held a day-long forum and released a groundbreaking study, *Voting in 2004: A Report to the Nation on America's Election Process*. The forum and the report's recommendations became the foundation for Common Cause's agenda for election reform, an agenda focused on specific changes to remove barriers to voting.

▶ Common Cause trained and mobilized more than 200 activists to lobby 250 Members of Congress on Capitol Hill in June 2005, pushing for legislation requiring a voter-verifiable paper trail.

▶ Common Cause state offices in Colorado, Connecticut, New Jersey, New Mexico, and New York played key roles in efforts to pass laws to eliminate barriers to voting. In Colorado, Connecticut, and New Mexico, we helped pass major laws requiring voter-verified paper trails and making other improvements to protect voters.

▶ At a conference in October 2005, Common Cause brought together more than 75 advocates, lawmakers, and election officials from seven southwestern states to intensify their efforts to enact election reforms in their region.



Chellie Pingree greets former President Jimmy Carter after testifying before the Commission on Federal Election Reform, headed by Carter and former Secretary of State James Baker.

▶ When Georgia passed a law requiring that residents show either a driver's license or a \$20 government-issued photo ID at the polling place, Common Cause/Georgia challenged the law in court, and won.

▶ In June 2006, Common Cause released *Malfunction and Malfeasance: A Report on the Electronic Voting Machine Debacle*, which found that 17 states, including critical swing states such as Pennsylvania, are at "high" risk of having election results compromised due to problems with voting machines known as DREs. The study has received wide media attention and will buttress our efforts to guarantee that each vote counts.

Common Cause also believes that as long as politicians control the process of redrawing the lines of congressional districts, all citizens will not be treated equally when it comes to casting votes and holding elected officials accountable. Lawmakers in states across the country have demonstrated their inability to draw legislative and congressional districts that adequately represent voters. Instead, they draw districts that ensure their own re-election. In the process, communities are unfairly divided and voters are left with little meaningful electoral choice.

For these reasons, Common Cause committed significant resources to efforts to raise the visibility of redistricting reform. In California, Common Cause teamed up with high-profile Republican governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, to put the redistricting issue on the national radar screen. Common Cause was also a leader in campaigns in Florida and Massachusetts to make the redistricting process more equitable. While these campaigns did not yield immediate results, they laid the groundwork for our continuing efforts to replace partisan redistricting with systems that ensure better representation and more competitive elections.



# Money & Politics

Common Cause has long fought against the corrupting influence of big money in our politics, and to create fair elections that make candidates listen to voters, not special interest campaign contributors.

Common Cause was the lead organization pushing for passage of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 (BCRA). BCRA banned “soft money” – the huge unlimited donations to national party committees from corporations, unions, and wealthy individuals.

But a soft money ban is only one step toward a system that makes people and ideas more important than money. Common Cause remains committed to the ultimate reform goal of Clean Elections, where candidates who demonstrate public support and agree not to raise any private donations receive public grants for their election campaigns. Common Cause is using the momentum of congressional scandals to lead a strong citizen coalition pushing for Clean Elections at the congressional level. In June 2006, Common Cause, Public Campaign Action Fund, Public Citizen, and the U.S. Public Interest Research Group (US PIRG) unveiled their “Voters First” pledge that the groups will ask all congressional candidates to sign. The pledge includes specific policies to make elections fair for all, restore congressional accountability, and protect voters’ right-to-know. Activists will use the pledge in congressional districts across the country to press candidates for federal office to support a comprehensive agenda to clean up Congress.



Legislative leaders applaud after Gov. Jodi Rell (center) signs Connecticut’s landmark Clean Elections law.

In addition Common Cause achieved several Clean Elections victories at the state and municipal level:

- ▶ **Connecticut Common Cause led the successful effort to pass a strong and comprehensive Clean Elections law.** Building on public outrage over state ethics scandals, Common Cause spearheaded an activist movement that forced a Republican governor and a Democratic legislature to work together to pass the law, which offers full public financing to candidates for all statewide and state legislative races who agree not to accept any private funds for their races and can demonstrate public support. Calling its passage “the bargain of the century,” *USA Today* editorialized that Connecticut’s new law will “save countless dollars doled out from public coffers to the favor seekers who fund campaigns now.” This was an especially important victory because it was passed by legislators, not directly by the people through a ballot initiative, and is the strongest and most comprehensive campaign reform passed by a legislature in the country.
- ▶ In **Albuquerque, New Mexico**, a Common Cause-led coalition convinced 69.9 percent of voters to support a clean elections law for all municipal races.
- ▶ **Common Cause/Oregon** also helped pass a clean elections law in **Portland**.
- ▶ **California Common Cause** helped spur the passage of a Clean Elections bill in the state assembly, the first time a Clean Elections bill had been passed by a floor vote in either house of the California legislature.

# Ethics

Public trust and engagement in democracy depend on the faith voters have in the integrity of their elected officials.

Three-quarters of the 8,000 adults recently surveyed by Zogby International said that their trust in government has declined over the past five years. Only three percent of respondents ranked Members of Congress highly trustworthy. When the public's faith in government ebbs, they are less likely to participate in the democratic process. Cynicism can perpetuate a vicious cycle, where fewer and fewer citizens vote, a trend that threatens representative democracy and encourages partisanship.

Long an ethics watchdog, Common Cause pushed for passage of the original Ethics in Government Act and the Lobby Disclosure Act, the nation's primary laws governing the conduct of elected officials in Congress and federal employees.

In 2005, Common Cause vigorously pressed the House to take ethical conduct seriously and to abandon the "truce" on filing ethics complaints that had paralyzed the House Ethics Committee for several years. Common Cause also successfully lobbied the House leadership to reinstate a longstanding rule requiring House Members to give up their leadership positions if indicted. In 2006, the Jack Abramoff scandal, the resignation of House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-TX), and the admission by Rep. Duke Cunningham (R-CA) that he had accepted bribes from a defense contractor all set the stage for a Common Cause push for greater ethics accountability in Congress. Common Cause advanced



Nearly 300 San Diego voters listen intently as congressional candidates Brian Bilbray and Francine Busby discuss ethics and campaign finance reform during a Common Cause-sponsored debate.

a proposal for an independent ethics commission, modeled after successful state commissions in Florida and Kentucky, which was eventually introduced in legislation sponsored by Senator Barack Obama (D-IL). While Congress continues to resist strong ethics reforms, Common Cause has laid the foundation for substantive ethics reform in the future.

In addition, several Common Cause state offices achieved major ethics reforms:

► **Common Cause/New Jersey** helped pass strong "pay-to-play" rules, to stop the practice of contractors using political donations to secure lucrative state contracts. *The New York Times* and *Roll Call* called the law the strongest in the country.

► **Common Cause/North Carolina, Florida, and New York** all achieved passage of substantive lobby reform and disclosure laws. In Florida, legislators are barred from accepting any gifts, including meals, from lobbyists.

# Media Reform

Information is the leaven of democracy, but news about local issues and local elections that offers diverse points of view is harder and harder to find.

For nearly a quarter century, our national policies have increasingly made it easier for media to get bigger. When media is dominated by a handful of corporations, the public lacks access to diverse sources of fact-based journalism. A commitment to local news and public affairs lags with out-of-town corporate owners that often squeeze news staffs in order to reap the highest profits for shareholders.

In 2005, Common Cause founded the Media and Democracy Coalition, comprised of 25 organizations working together to achieve media reform at the local, state, and national levels. The coalition drafted the **Bill of Media Rights**, endorsed by more than 200 groups representing more than 40 million individuals, stressing the core values that should be at the heart of the telecom and media ownership debate.



Common Cause and the Coalition are addressing the problems of concentrated media ownership, protecting the public's access to community media, and fighting state laws that would block local governments from setting up high-speed Internet networks to offer low-cost or no-cost Internet access to their citizens, benefiting low-income and rural families. Common Cause has also played a key role in public interest advocacy concerning the rewrite of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. Last year, in preparation for congressional action in 2006, Common Cause released its study, *The Fallout from the Telecommunications Act of 1996: Unintended Consequences and Lessons Learned*, at a coalition event at the National Press Club that generated significant publicity and was used widely by coalition partners to educate their constituencies. In 2006, Common Cause released *Wolves in Sheep's Clothing: Telecom Industry Front Groups and Astroturf*, a groundbreaking report exposing corporate-backed think tanks and fake grassroots organizations, as well as an analysis documenting more than a half billion dollars spent on political donations and lobbying by industry interests to influence telecommunications policy.

Common Cause also began an intensive public education effort to preserve the Internet's crucial role in promoting democracy by serving as a vehicle for citizen engagement and offering diverse sources of information and opinion. This effort has been critical at a time

Common Cause interns and Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-ME) participate in a "net neutrality" event on Capitol Hill.

## *Wolves in Sheep's Clothing:*

### **Telecom Industry Front Groups and Astroturf**



A special report prepared by:  
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when federal regulators and Congress are considering giving corporations the right to discriminate against content on the Internet, and to charge content providers for access. Common Cause generated more than 100,000 citizen signatures for a petition urging Congress to protect “net neutrality” – our right to access any information we want and use any lawful application on the Internet without interference from an Internet service provider. Common Cause also successfully lobbied the House Judiciary Committee to pass a strong “net neutrality” bill.

Additionally, over the past year, Common Cause:

- ▶ Mobilized more than 150,000 citizens to call on the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) to be more transparent and open, proposing a menu of reforms of the CPB governance structure.
- ▶ Drew attention to problems of partisanship and lack of accountability at the CPB, resulting in a shakeup at the organization, and the approval of new governance rules that reduce partisanship and increase transparency.
- ▶ Successfully lobbied the House and Senate Appropriations committees to restore more than \$200 million in cuts to public broadcasting’s budget for fiscal year 2006.
- ▶ Generated more than 7,000 comments from citizens to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) opposing rules to relax cable ownership limits.
- ▶ Analyzed the failures of U.S. telecom policy that resulted in emergency communications breakdowns following Hurricane Katrina, and recommended policy alternatives.
- ▶ Advocated in Congress and at the FCC for increased public benefits to be part of the digital television transition.
- ▶ Participated in the World Summit on the Information Society at meetings in Geneva and Tunisia, networking with NGOs from around the world on global media reform issues.



# Civil Rights

Since its inception, Common Cause has been committed to the cause of civil rights, particularly to protecting the rights of all citizens to participate fully in their democracy.

Since its enactment in 1965, the Voting Rights Act has played a major role in protecting the voting rights of African-Americans, Latinos, and people who are not fully proficient in English. The status of the Voting Rights Act is now at a crucial turning point. Several of the law's provisions expire in 2007, and Congress must decide whether to keep those provisions on the books. But many barriers that have been erected to shut out voters still exist, and court rulings have steered the law away from its original intent to end discriminatory voting practices and to encourage the creation of districts in which minority voters have a real chance to elect candidates of their preference.

Common Cause joined with numerous civil rights and public interest organizations to work in coalition to urge Congress to renew and strengthen the Voting Rights Act. We held in-district meetings between Common Cause members and congressional offices, lobbied on



Flanked by civil rights leaders and members of Congress, Chellie Pingree urges Congress to renew and strengthen the Voting Rights Act.

Capitol Hill, and testified before the Judiciary Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives in support of improving the Voting Rights Act.

Common Cause has also been a key member of a diverse coalition pushing for congressional passage of the DC Voting Rights Act, to give more than half a million Americans in the District of Columbia voting representation in the U.S. House of Representatives, repairing more than two centuries of injustice. A Common Cause petition to Congress urging DC voting rights has garnered 15,000 signatures.

# Funders & Supporters

**Common Cause and the Common Cause Education Fund enjoy broad support from many different funding sources, including dues-paying members, major donors, and foundations. In 2005-2006, the Common Cause Education Fund received major foundation funding from:**

- ▶ The Agua Fund, Inc.
- ▶ Albuquerque Community Foundation
- ▶ The Arca Foundation
- ▶ Paul and Edith Babson Foundation
- ▶ Beldon Fund
- ▶ Brett Family Foundation
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- ▶ California Community Foundation
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**Common Cause has state chapters in:**

California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

- ▶ Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation
- ▶ Rhode Island Foundation
- ▶ Rockefeller Family Foundation
- ▶ Spencer Foundation
- ▶ Marcia Brady Tucker Foundation
- ▶ Wallace Global Foundation

*Common Cause and the Common Cause Education Fund wish to acknowledge the critical efforts of individuals across the country who join us in this work and contribute their time, energy, and expertise – Washington Connection volunteers who inform and engage Common Cause members by phone, state chapter board members who guide local efforts, and the thousands of citizen activists who make their voices heard - in the interest of an open, functioning democracy that truly serves the public interest.*

# Partners of Common Cause

Common Cause appreciates the support of our many members and donors. The following individuals made gifts of \$1,000 or more to support the national programs of Common Cause and Common Cause Education Fund in 2005.

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A National Governing Board oversees Common Cause. Governing board members are distinguished Americans, often with special expertise on Common Cause issues.

## The Common Cause National Governing Board

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University of Maryland

### **Leonard Baynes**

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for Civil Rights and Economic  
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St. John's University

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National Council of Churches USA

### **Julie A. Fernandes**

Senior Policy Analyst  
Leadership Conference on Civil  
Rights

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Asian American Legal Defense and  
Education Fund

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and Political Science  
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Director of Government Affairs  
Service Employees International  
Union

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Capitol Broadcasting Company

### **Jack Gould**

Past Chair and Issues Chair  
Common Cause/Nebraska

### **Leonard Hill**

Leonard Hill Films

### **Charles Kolb \***

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### **William Kraus \***

Co-chair  
Common Cause/Wisconsin

### **Peter Lauria**

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Beers and Cutler

### **Eric Liu**

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The New America Foundation

### **Maya MacGuineas**

President  
Committee for a Responsible Federal  
Budget  
The New America Foundation

### **Spencer Overton**

Associate Professor of Law  
The George Washington University  
Law School

### **Harold Pachios**

Managing Partner  
Preti, Flaherty, Beliveau, Pachios  
& Haley

## **\* Member, Common Cause Education Fund Board of Directors**

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Novelist

**Chellie Pingree \***  
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Center for Government Studies

Current as of May 6, 2006.

Derek Bok, President Emeritus,  
Harvard University, is immediate  
past chairman of the National  
Governing Board, having served  
February 1999 – May 2006

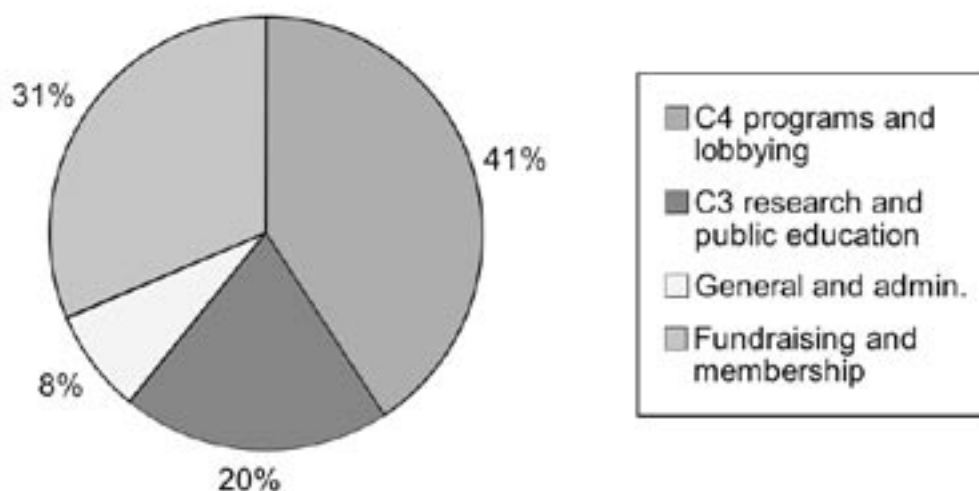
Common Cause/Rhode Island Director Phil West meeting with civic leaders from Thailand, one of many international delegations to visit Common Cause offices to learn about citizen activism.



## Financial Figures

Common Cause and Common Cause Education Fund combined budget

January 1, 2004 - June 30, 2005.



*For more information on any of the initiatives outlined in this report, please visit our website at [www.commoncause.org](http://www.commoncause.org).*



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